

“WHY BELIEVE”

“God’s Man” (John 1:19-28)

June 20, 1999 • Sunday AM • Dr. Jack Graham

We will serve Him. Amen. Thank you and please be seated. It’s an incredible sight to see nearly 7,000 people standing to say with Joshua. “As for we and our house we will serve the Lord.”

I see Dr. Bailey Smith and his wife Sandy with us this morning, guests with the Cherry’s. We had a wonderful wedding here Friday night in their family. I couldn’t help thinking as we were singing about the storm there. I heard the choir singing, *“Through any storm we will trust the Lord.”* I was thinking about Tom Ellis who is Sandy Smith’s brother. Their house burned to the ground several months ago. They moved into another home and then the tornado took it away in Oklahoma. A reporter caught up with Tom Ellis and said, I understand you lost another home. He said, no, you misunderstood. He said, well I have it right here in my notes that your first house burned down and now your second home was taken away in the tornado. Tom Ellis said, no, we lost our house, but, we didn’t lose our home. So, through the storms of life built on the foundation of Jesus Christ lets our homes stand as a beautiful and powerful testimony of His grace and power, no matter the storm or the season of life.

Take God’s Word and turn with me to John’s Gospel the first chapter. We’re in the beginning stages of a series of messages from the Gospel of John. In these opening Sundays and months in our new facility we want to take this Gospel and ask the question, “Why Believe?” Why Believe? Because that’s why John the disciple of Jesus gave us this gospel. He said, [John 20:31]

31 but these are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

So John called various witnesses and offers evidence, demonstrations of the deity of the LORD Jesus Christ, that we might believe. So we’re asking and answering that question from the gospel. “Why Believe?” Now Joshua, indeed, gave us this wonderful verse that we just sang, [Joshua 24:15]

15 ... “As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.”

There have been many great men, God’s men, throughout the scripture and throughout history. You think of all the incredible personalities that punctuate the pages of scripture. Men like Moses. Men like Joshua. Men like Joseph. Men like David. The disciples and followers of Christ, Paul. But, there is a man of whom Jesus said,

[Luke 7:28]

28 “For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet ...”

Now that's quite a bold statement, isn't it? The greatest man born of woman who ever walked upon the earth. Who is that man? He must have been a prophet. Well, he himself said, I am not a prophet. Jesus said,

28 *"...there is not a greater prophet..."*

Who could be a greater man than the prophets? This particular man didn't perform any miracles. He didn't part the Red Sea with his staff. Nor did he pray the rains would not fall then pray that the rains descended. He didn't raise the dead as a great old testament prophet raised the dead. He never wrote a new testament book. Yet Jesus said, this man, if you want to see a man, if you want to see a man's man and if you want to see God's man, take a look at my friend John the Baptist. Beginning in John 1:6

6 *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.*

Not John the disciple. But, this is John the Baptist or John the baptizer. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of a life that all through him might believe. He was not that light, but, was sent to bear witness of that light. In other words, he was a burning and shining light. Then look in John 1:19-28

- Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jew sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"*
- 20 *He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."*
- 21 *And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."*
- 22 *Then they said to him, "Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?"*
- 23 *He said: I am The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the way of the LORD," as the prophet Isaiah said."*
- 24 *Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees.*
- 25 *And they asked him, saying, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"*
- 26 *John answered them, saying, "I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know."*
- 27 *"It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose."*
- 28 *These things were done in Bethabara beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.*

A man sent from God, whose name was John. Remember about John the Baptist when we meet him in the initial stages of John's Gospel. He was getting an incredible amount of press. He was a well known celebrity, if you will, in his times. People were rushing out to the desert into the wilderness just to hear him speak. He had an audience before Herod, upon an occasion, the king of the nation. The religious scribes and Pharisees were all up in the air about this man. He was a man, but yet, he was like no other man. Because Jesus said, [Matthew 11:11]

11 *"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist;" ...*

What makes this man so significant? Why was this man the greatest man who ever lived? It was because he was the direct forerunner of the LORD Jesus Christ. It is his connection and nearness to Jesus Christ. His fellowship and relationship with Jesus Christ that made him the greatest man who ever lived. Something about John the Baptist, he was prophesied in the old testament. He was anointed from his mother's womb to preach the gospel and to usher in the messianic age. He was the son of a priest. He was a powerful man. He was a man upon whom the spirit of God rested. Yet, he was born to speak just one sentence, really. That sentence is this,
[John 1:29]

29 ... *"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"*

John baptized thousands and he preached like no man had ever preached before him. Had he been the greatest man who ever lived and yet failed to speak this one sentence, his ministry, his life would have been an abject failure. But, he was God's man because he was a Jesus man. He introduced Christ to the world. When he exploded on the scene in human history, he influenced thousands and invited them into the kingdom to know Jesus Christ. He preached the message of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. He came at a strategic time. For four hundred years there had been no voice in Israel, no prophetic voice. Moral and spiritual darkness had settled upon the people. There was religion, but, they needed a revival. They needed Jesus Christ. So John the baptizer was sent from God to introduce Jesus to the world.

Now isn't that our assignment in life men and women? To introduce the world to Jesus Christ. Not before His first coming, but, at the end of this age at the outset of the return of Jesus Christ. John the baptizer came to introduce Christ to the world the first time. It is our responsibility to introduce men, women, boys and girls to faith in Jesus Christ before Christ comes again. Now there's so much to learn from John's life, from his witness and ministry. Because, just as he came at a strategic time we are living in a strategic time. Think for a moment about the intensity of this man's ministry. We're told in the John 1:6-8 that he was a true witness, a burning and shining light. Now a witness is someone who has evidenced or a witness is someone who steps aside and gets out of the spotlight, removes self from the scene and points others to Christ. That's what John the baptizer did. He was willing for his great life to be eclipsed by the greater life of Christ. He was willing to say, I'm not the light but Jesus Christ He is the light. The Word of God, this witness of Jesus Christ, burned in his heart.
[Matthew 11:10]

10 ... *"Behold, I send My messenger before Your face," ...*

Literally in the face of God. You know there's a difference in being sent for God and being sent from God. John the Baptist came from the very heart of the very face of God. He had been so close to God. Living in His presence, experiencing His power that he was ignited with spiritual power and passion and the intensity and the passion of his life is burning and shining for Jesus Christ. Now let me ask you; are you man, woman, are you shining for Jesus Christ? Are you a burning and shining light for Him?

The Bible talks about three kinds of temperatures, spiritual temperatures. It talks about people who are cold. In other words cut off from spiritual life. They are a corpse spiritually, because there is no life in Christ, spiritually cold and cut off from God. Then the Bible speaks of those who are lukewarm. These are folks who are cool and casual about their faith. Jesus talked about the lukewarm; [Revelation 3:16]

16 *“So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, ...”*

They have a casual interest in the things of God. When they get to church, rather than worshipping from a burning heart and a shining light for Christ, they're already looking at their watch or watches. Casual, cool they live in the land of moderation and mediocrity. Jesus of these; [Revelation 3:16]

16 *“... I will vomit you out of My mouth.”*

I'll spew you out of my mouth because your making me sick. But, then the Bible talks about those who are hot. Who are hot hearted like those disciples who walked with Jesus along the road to Emmaus and said, [Luke 24:32]

32 *“Did not our heart burn within us while he talked with us on the road...?”*

Hot hearted believers.

What is your spiritual temperature this morning? Cold, cut off from God, cut off from Christ? Spiritually lukewarm and tepid and half interested? Or are you a burning and shining light for Jesus Christ? We need, listen to me men, we need men today of integrity, of righteousness, of devotion to Christ, hot hearted men whose one passion and priority of life is to shine as an example and a testimony and representative of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist was burning hot. They came to him and said; [John 1:21]

21 *“...Are you Elijah?”...“Are you the Prophet?”*

Are you Moses? Are you Messiah?

[John 1:23]

23 *He said: “I am*

The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ...”

The word that John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gives us there for crying means howling. It describes the intensity of this man's voice as he spoke. Now of course John was a very unusual man. You might even call him a radical for Jesus Christ. He lived in the desert. He separated himself from the world. He subsisted on a very unusual diet and wore unique clothing. As I've stated earlier, he was incredibly popular. He had his own crowd, his own church, if you will. But, when Jesus Christ came on the scene and when it was time to introduce Christ, he said, look at me, I am not a prophet, I am not the Messiah, I am simply sent to bear witness of the light of one who is coming, the LORD Jesus. I am unworthy to untie his shoes. Not only do we see the intensity of this man John the Baptist and the intensity that is needed in our own lives, men and women, but we see the humility of his life. Though bold and crying in the wilderness, he stepped aside in order that Christ might be given the preeminence. He said; [Mark 1:3]

3 *“...Prepare the way of the LORD;...”*

Prepare to meet your God. Why such urgency? Why such intensity? Because the time was short. The kingdom had arrived. Sometimes we ask, why do we get so excited about bringing people to Christ? Why is it so important to build great churches to the glory of God? Because the time is now and the time is short. Today is the day of salvation and we like John the Baptist are simply to be heralds, voices crying in the wilderness, standing in the gap, howling and pleading with people to come to Him.

You know a herald is a road paver, literally. Now you may watch, as I've watched I 75, Central Expressway. They've been working on that road since I've moved to Dallas ten years ago. I guess their gonna keep working on it till Jesus comes. But, you watch those road workers in the heat, in the cold, in the rain and every season, I think. I think their out there working. We're like those road workers. It's a tough task. No one said it would be easy.

Some of you are thinking, what am I gonna do with my life? Well I think I'll go to college. I think I'll get married. I think I'll settle down, get a job, have a few children, make some money, live to be an old man an old woman and then die. But I really don't know what I'm gonna do with my life. Let me remind you, if you are a believer of the LORD Jesus Christ, really anyone, but certainly if your a believer in the LORD Jesus Christ you are not your own. You do not belong to you. You are bought with a price, the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Your life has been given to you that you might give it back to Him and glorify Him and honor Him and serve Him and witness of His power and of His grace in your life.

Daniel, the prophet, was called in to speak to Belchazzar, the king of Babylonia. Belchazzar was a wicked man and defied the God of heaven. So judgment was coming. Daniel pronouncing that judgment upon this king, said to him; [Daniel 5:23]

23 "... God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified."

He is coming in judgment against you. Now, think about that. God who holds your breath in His hands. Every breath we take, every day we live belongs to Him. In Him we live and move and have our being. How dare you live your life apart from the God who holds your very breath in His hands? If your a believer in the LORD Jesus Christ, how dare you be a pew potato? How dare you say, I don't have a purpose, I don't have a meaning, I don't have a reason for being? When God has called you to be a burning and shining light for Jesus Christ.

There was a young shoe salesman that once heard a man say, the world is yet to see what God can do with a man whose life was completely yielded and given to Jesus Christ. He was so moved by that statement that he said in his heart, by God's grace I will be that man. That young shoe salesman was a man by the name of D. L. Moody who became the great evangelist of the nineteenth century. The nineteenth century version of Billy Graham. He shook the world for Christ. He burned as a shining light for Christ.

Gentlemen, men make it your passion, your purpose, your priority in life to give yourself unreservedly, unconditionally to Jesus Christ. That's what John did. Say, I will be the man. I will be a man of God. His humility to surrender to Christ and to step aside. His intensity and passion for the things of God. John the Baptist teaches us something else. He teaches me something else. He teaches me something about his authority. You know his authority was simply a voice crying in the wilderness. What was his message? It was to repent for the kingdom of God was at hand. Now, John the Baptist was not Mr. subtlety. Nor was he, you

know, Rev. sounding brass or Rev. tear tickler. He was politically incorrect. When the Pharisees and the religious leaders of his time came out, he said things like, hey you bunch of snakes! Now, that won't get you very far at the denominational headquarters. When the people came out he preached a message of repentance. Not that's a missing word in a contemporary church, repentance. Maybe we think the message of repentance should be delivered at the jails or the prisons or at [turned tape]. Or maybe we think the message of repentance is for the crooks and the drug addicts and the prostitutes. But, let me remind you, when John came preaching a message

of repentance, he delivered it to a religious crowd. People who knew all the rules and lived on the list. But, as Jesus would later say; [Matthew 23:27]

27 *"...but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness."*

So he came with a message of repentance to all who were living a lie, to all who were living hypocrisy. As you know the Bible teaches us that we must repent in order to become a Christian. You say well that's the message of the old testament, isn't it? Isn't that the message of John the Baptist? Jesus came with love, love, love, love, love. *"All you need is love."* That's the message of Jesus. No!

Did you know the very first words recorded of Jesus in Mark's Gospel when He delivered His inaugural sermon were; [Mark 1:15]

15 *"... the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."*

Jesus said; [Luke 13:3]

3 *"... but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."*

Now what does that mean? Well, you may have heard that the word repentance means to change direction. It does. But, to define it more fully, repentance means a change of heart resulting in a change of direction in your life. That's repentance! Now it doesn't mean when you first come to Christ that you even know what all the sins are. Throughout your Christian life, God the Holy Spirit, as you read the Word of God and as God moves in your heart you see areas of sin and weaknesses of your life and rebellion against God. You'll repent of those things as you go. But, when you first come to Jesus Christ you must first come willing to say, LORD I turn from my sin and I turn from my idols and I trust in Jesus Christ. When that happens your life is transformed from the inside out.

Suppose someone walked up to you and just punched you right in the nose? You say, man what are you doing? Don't hit me like that. The fellow says, well I'm so sorry I don't know what got into me, I don't know where all this anger comes from me. It must be something from my inner child. I don't know what's wrong with me. Maybe I'm playing to many of those video games. I'm so sorry. That's all right man. Try not to do that again. Five minutes later, wam-o, he hits you in the face again. Tears are streaming this time. Oh, I'm so sorry, I don't know what's wrong with me. I'll never do it again. Then five minutes later he hits you again. Pretty soon, you'll figure it out and leave. No, repentance means, not perfection but the direction of your life is changed through Jesus Christ. It means, by His power, the grace of God in your life that you will begin to live in obedience to him. There's a difference in true repentance and false repentance. Your driving down the road. You get pulled over for speeding. Your sorry.

But, if you drive the same way when he lets you go that means you were just sorry for getting caught. You didn't truly repent. The Bible says of Esau, who was a fleshly man, that he sought repentance but could not find it. Isn't that amazing? Here was a man who said he wanted to repent, but, he couldn't come to repentance. Why? Because he really didn't want to change and he didn't want God to change him.

Have you repented of your sin and come to faith in Jesus Christ? There are thousands upon tens of thousands of members of churches in American and around the world today, who have never repented of their sin and come to personal faith in Jesus Christ. Have you turned from your sin and trusted in Christ? John the Baptist came with that message of power and authority. You know when you look at John the Baptist's life, you look at his courage, you look at his compassion, you look at the conviction and you admire him. You wonder what makes this man tick? How could he be that kind of man? How can I be that kind of man? How could I be that kind of friend to Christ and follower of Christ?

Let me mention just three aspects of John's life that I believe will encourage you to be a man or a woman or God.

1 [Luke 1:15] John was great in the eyes of God!

15 *"For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy spirit, even from his mother's womb."*

Great in the eyes of God! I ask you Christians, could there be anything more important, more significant in you and me than that? Great, not in the eyes of men, but, great in the eyes of God. Hey, I want you to like me. I really do. I want you to like the things that I say, the things that I preach. Most likely you want me to like you as well. But, the fact is, some people dislike me. Now I can't hardly believe it, but it's true. You might even be offended by some of the things I say and some of the things that I'm about to say here in just a few moments, literally. Thought I love you and I want you to like me and love me back, the ultimate goal of my life is not to please you, nor to be great in your sight or anybody else's sight. I'm a long way from it. But, my eye is on one single goal and that is to be great in the sight of God. Believing and trusting and pleasing Him. We shouldn't care what the polls say or what people say. John the Baptist didn't. John the Baptist did not care what people thought about him. His only concern is what do people think about Jesus Christ. He lived his life emptying himself of his own personal ambition in order that he might be great in the sight of God, please God, keeping his eye upon Him. You know sometimes we can get discouraged because some Christian fails us. You follow Christ and your looking at the example of some believer. We certainly have to apologize at times for the poor example that some set. But, let me ask you this question. When you signed up to follow Jesus Christ, did you sign up to follow other Christians or did you sign up to follow Him? You follow Christ; [Hebrews 13:8]

8 *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*

You keep your eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of the faith. You make it your one ambition to please Him. Like John the Baptist you will discover greatness in the sight of God. John didn't care if people thought he was a Jesus freak or a fool or a fanatic. He wanted simply to be a representative of his LORD and that should be our goal as well.

2 Not only his devotion to God, but, his discipline, his personal discipline in his life. [Luke 1:15]

15 *“...shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit...”*

Let me tell you something as straight as I know how to say it. For some of you men. Your going to allow some things in your life to keep you from achieving what God wants you to achieve before your wife, your children, your church, your community, because, you are unwilling to discipline yourself in some of the areas of your life. John disciplined himself in this area. He totally abstained from alcohol and wine and strong drink because as a discipline and a devotion of his own heart he was committed to something better, something greater, something higher. That was the fullness of the spirit of God in his life. Can I tell you something? I despise alcohol! This is when some of you start not liking me. You say, why do you despise alcohol? Because I've seen the ravages and the destruction of homes and families and lives and boys and girls and teenagers. Often on the cuff of those who claim to know Christ, that only get a beer at the nineteenth hole or do it a little bit socially. Because after all they say, I'm freed in Christ, I'm liberated. But, it's this very area of your life in particular for some of you that the lack of discipline in your own life in this particular area is going to destroy your personal testimony and witness for Jesus Christ. I had a man walk up to me after the Saturday night service when I was preaching along these lines. He said, thirteen years ago alcohol destroyed my life and my family. He said, I want to thank you for saying that. Because I've since come to Christ and my life has been transformed. But, you tell the people tomorrow, at least there's one guy who knows what alcohol can do to a family and to a life. You just preach on pastor. We have a man who's a deacon here in our church. His testimony is that he came to his first service about eight or nine years ago now. He was an alcoholic. He came with his wife, after his wife finally got him to come for the first time to a service at Prestonwood, lo and behold guess what I was preaching about that day? You got it. I'm not hammering this subject every time I stand up. If I'm in the neighborhood I pay my respects to this issue. But, that particular day I was all over it. Here's this guy, but, rather than being offended and saying I'll never go back to that church. You know what happened? The spirit of Christ, the spirit of God convicted him. He went home and he got on his face before God and he received Christ as his savior. His life was transformed. He put up the drinking. He disciplined his life in other areas. Today he's a dynamic servant of God in this church. John the Baptist was willing to put aside anything and everything in his life, as we should as well in order that we might be at our very best. Why do we need to live on substitutes, when we have the Holy Spirit? I've got some boys and I've got a daughter in my family and I would rather die than disappoint them. You've got boys and girls in your family and I would just as soon die as disappoint your children as well. But what if the pastor's out doing certain things and living in certain ways that damage the testimony and damage your own children. Jesus said;

[Matthew 18:6]

6 *“But whoever cause one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”*

So instead of our talking about our liberty and our freedom, let's start talking about our love for people and our desire for people to know Jesus Christ and to follow Him. John the Baptist did that. John was strong in his convictions. Jesus said; [Matthew 11:7]

- 7 ... *“What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?”*
8 *“But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? ...”*

No! John the Baptist swung hard and he hit hard. He was a burning bold witness for Christ.

3 Finally, his determination. His one determination to point people to Jesus Christ, to be a witness for Him. He said something that I believe should be the motto of every believer's life. [John 3:30]

30 “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

Because he was willing to move aside and say to the world. [John 1:29]

29 ... “Behold The Lamb of God...”

Behold Jesus Christ

29 “...who takes away the sin of the world!”

He was according to Jesus Christ, [Luke 7:28]

28 *“For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; ...”*

The world needed a savior and John knew it. The moral and spiritual darkness demanded a Messiah. So does ours. Our purpose and our priority in life is to magnify Jesus Christ. When you make that your purpose you will rock your world. You can shake your neighborhood, your city, your community for Christ. Men, listen to me. Let me ask you, are you a man of God, a man sent from God? Ladies, are you following Christ with all your heart? My prayer is that everyone of us, even as we stood together, when we were ask a moment ago. in commitment of our lives to Christ men that in our hearts we'll be standing up as well. If you don't know Jesus Christ as your savior. If you've never repented and received Christ we want to give you that opportunity to come to Christ today. You may be a church member. You may not be a member of any church. This may be your first time here. You may have come for years and months. But, do you know Jesus Christ? Have you turned from your sin and trusted in Him? Have you invited Christ in your life?

I'm gonna ask that every head be bowed and every eye closed. Right now in your heart of hearts I want to leave you with a prayer of personal faith in Jesus Christ. Pray, if you don't know Christ, or maybe your not certain whether you know Christ and you've never settled this issue. Would you right now pray in your heart?

Lord Jesus Christ, be merciful to me a sinner. I believe you died for my sins. You rose again that I might be saved. Right now I turn from my sin and I trust only in You for my salvation. Jesus come into my life. Asking, Jesus Christ be my Lord and Savior. Live in me and by the power of Your Holy Spirit change me and make me Your child. Give me the power to live for You every day until You come for me. If you prayed that prayer, thank Him from the bottom of your heart. Just say Lord Jesus, thank You for hearing my prayer. For the Bible says, whoever calls upon the name of the LORD will be saved. So thank Him and promise

Him that you will stand for Him beginning this morning right now. You'll not let anything or anyone keep you from following Him, not people, not pleasures, nothing will keep you from following Jesus Christ.

Father, take now this time of decision and by your Holy Spirit bring precious men, women, student, boys and girls to Christ this hour. For all of us LORD who desire to live for you. God let us put aside anything and everything that would keep us from being at our best. LORD fill us with Your spirit that we might burn as a shining light for You. For we pray in Jesus name. Amen.